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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN  
OSD FOR SHIVERS  
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SUBJECT: PRT GARDEZ: PAKTIA PROVINCE SIX MONTH REPORT

SUMMARY

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11. (SBU) Security incidents have increased with the onset of warm weather in Paktia, but vigorous government and coalition counter-insurgency activities have maintained a climate that allows for expanded economic development and the gradual extension of GOA administrative control. The new governor is engaging tribal leaders to build support for the central government. He must overcome widespread disenchantment, suspicion of the Kabul administration, and frustration over a lack of basic government services. Paktia's economy, which is based on subsistence agriculture, will require significant assistance to be reflected in an improvement in the standard of living. The PRT's USAID and US military aid programs, along with German implementer GTZ, are the major sources of international assistance. UNAMA and several NGO's are present in the province, but donors remain reluctant to fund projects due to lingering security concerns. Paktia's conservative, predominantly Pashtun population impinges on women's rights. Weak rule of law institutions increase dependence on traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. Despite these drawbacks, international players in the field are optimistic that, with sufficient resources, progress is possible. END SUMMARY.

SECURITY: HEIGHTENED INSURGENCY BUT OVERALL IMPROVEMENT

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12. (SBU) The number and scale of security incidents in Paktia have significantly increased during the past six months. The onset of warm weather has facilitated insurgent movement into the area from neighboring Pakistan, but overall violence appears to be less severe than last year at this time, mostly due to GOA and Coalition taking the initiative against insurgents. ANA performance has improved steadily, while the ANP remains weak. Corruption remains an issue for the ANP. The Gardez Regional Training Center (RTC) has trained over 300 ANAP recruits who have been deployed in the province -- with mixed results. The Taliban still control parts of Southern Zormat District, an insurgent bastion and staging area, and remain active, though less influential, in the strategic Khost/Gardez Pass. Security is sufficiently stable in the rest of Paktia to enable economic development efforts to continue and expand.

13. (SBU) The Pakistan-Afghan border of Northern Jaji and Dand Wa Pathan Districts remains tense, but stable following clashes in May between Afghan security forces and Pakistan military elements. Immediately following the border flare-up, Coalition and Afghan forces ambushed a 300 man Taliban force seeking to overrun the Jaji district center, killing up to 120 of the insurgents. Most combat continues in Zormat where the ANA scored a success in killing three top Taliban commanders in a single encounter. IED attacks continue throughout the province. The most devastating incident took place in May in Gardez where a suicide bomber killed 14 innocent bystanders while attempting to attack a coalition convoy.

POLITICAL: AGGRESSIVE GOVERNOR AND WEAK INSTITUTIONS  
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14. (U) Since assuming his duties last November, Governor Rahmatullah Rahmat has proven to be an energetic administrator who has emphasized anti-corruption and administrative efficiency. The Attorney General's Office gave a boost to these efforts by arresting and dismissing several high level provincial officials, including the Education and Health Directors. The notoriously corrupt Police Chief was replaced with a more effective officer. Rahmat has attempted to appoint capable officials in key areas, including Zormat, and has brought loyalists into the administration. He wields a firm hand with local officials and traditional leaders and meets frequently with them. Rahmat and his department directors complain about a lack of central government funding for their activities.

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15. (SBU) Perceptions of and allegiance to the provincial and district administrators depends largely on the personalities and capabilities of individual administrators. The government's continued inability to provide basic services is reflected in a cynical attitude toward government among most Paktians, who, in turn, continue to rely on traditional authorities. Local residents view the central government as weak, corrupt, and incompetent, though the most visceral condemnations are reserved for neighboring Pakistan for promoting the insurgency and seeking to destabilize the region. Parliamentarians representing the province in Kabul are not significant players in Paktia, though MP and former Mujahideen commander Pacha Khan Zadran has a notable personal following. The Provincial Council plays a useful role in promoting development projects but is still evolving as a political institution.

ECONOMIC: ENORMOUS DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE  
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16. (U) The Paktia economy is based primarily on subsistence or semi-subsistence farming. Commerce and smuggling with Pakistan and remittances from abroad provide some compensatory income, the province has enormous development needs. The stable security situation in most areas of Paktia has encouraged some Afghan and international NGO's to increase their engagement. UNAMA's Southeastern Regional Headquarters is located in Gardez. Lingering security concerns continue to deter most donors and the PRT continues to play a key development role.

CULTURAL/SOCIAL: TRADITIONAL NORMS PREVAIL  
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17. (U) Paktia's conservative, rural population is 90 percent Pashtun, most living in isolated communities. About 70 percent of the population is illiterate, and traditional tribal social norms prevail. Despite some improvements, women typically suffer from limited access to education, forced marriages, "badan" (exchange of female

relatives as compensation in a tribal feud), and honor crimes. Tribal disputes are commonplace, especially over land issues, and are typically resolved by traditional inter-tribal councils, sometimes overseen by the Governor. Dependence on traditional dispute resolution mechanisms is due in part to the weak rule of law sector in Paktia. Judges and prosecutors are poorly paid, under-trained, and vulnerable to corruption.

18. (SBU) While the ANA generally has respected human rights, allegations of abuse have emerged from the Taliban-influenced Zormat District, scene of most combat operations in the province. These allegations include: arbitrary arrest and detention, the theft of property during searches, extortion, and extra-legal execution. The provincial National Security Directorate (PDS) has been accused of arbitrary arrest and extortion. Some citizens complained of being wrongfully targeted for operations by the ANA and US forces.

#### CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM DESPITE OBSTACLES

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19. (SBU) Paktia's tribal social structures and lack of economic development helps make it vulnerable to insurgents. Lack of capacity and funding for government institutions, further hampered by corruption, remain major impediments to expanded government influence. The people of Paktia nevertheless are receptive to international efforts and loyal to the concept of an Afghan national identity. Efforts to improve the situation are beginning to bear fruit, but progress is grudging and incremental. Coalition and GOA efforts to improve security seem to be succeeding, especially with the commitment of more troops to the region.

WOOD